NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2015

intercom

THE MAGAZINE OF THE SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

SPONSORED BY Adobe

TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION AT A CROSSROADS 6

WHAT'S OVER THE HORIZON FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION AND ITS PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION? 12

TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION: STATE OF THE INDUSTRY 15

THE UNITED NATIONS OF CONTENT 18

MADWORLD

The Premier Technical Communication and Content Strategy Conference

APRIL 10-12, 2016 | HILTON SAN DIEGO RESORT & SPA | SAN DIEGO, CA

*Learn More at **www.MadWorldConference.com***

MadWorld 2016 is the premier technical communication and content strategy conference for technical writers, documentation managers and content strategists.

SESSION CONTENT INCLUDES:

- Advanced CSS Techniques
- Advanced Print Publishing
- Boosting Performance
- Career Development
- Case Studies
- Content Strategy
- eLearning
- Extending Flare with JavaScript, JQuery and More
- Hands-on Workshops
- Leveraging Word™ Content with Doc-To-Help
- Managing Complex Projects
- Managing Flare Users Groups
- Search and SEO
- Single Source Publishing
- Source Control
- Team Authoring
- Translation Management

> *Thank you very much for a great event! Not only was the location a treat – the lectures and presentations were knowledgeable and all of them so professionally prepared! The food and drink were not only in abundance – but also very good. And everybody was friendly and helpful at all times!*
>
> *I am looking forward to next year's MadWorld!*
>
> ››› **NINA BARZGARAN**

madcap software

Copyright © 2015, MadCap Software, Inc., and its licensors. All rights reserved. MadCap Software, the MadCap Software logo, and Doc-to-Help are trademarks or registered trademarks of MadCap Software, Inc., in the United States and/or other countries. Other marks are the properties of their respective owners.

doc·to·help®
by madcap software

Using Microsoft® Word™ to Create Your Documentation?
Get the Most Out of Your Content with Doc-to-Help.

Easy Content Authoring & Re-use
Integrates directly into your Microsoft® Word™ interface.

Efficient Collaboration & Content Management
Choose from built-in technology, Microsoft® SharePoint®, or Microsoft® Team Foundation Server to work with teams.

Powerful Multi-channel Publishing
Write once and publish to the Web, desktop Help formats, mobile devices, eBooks, and print.

Download a Free Trial at **madcapsoftware.com**

madcap software

Copyright © 2015, MadCap Software, Inc., and its licensors. All rights reserved. MadCap Software, the MadCap Software logo, and Doc-to-Help are trademarks or registered trademarks of MadCap Software, Inc., in the United States and/or other countries. Other marks are the properties of their respective owners.

12

15

Nov/Dec 2015

Volume 62 | Issue 10

5 **From the Editor**

FEATURES

STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

6 **Technical Communication at a Crossroads**
By Saul Carliner
By describing the nature of the transformation technical communicators face in their fourth epoch, and identifying five challenges raised by that shift, the author asserts that the ways we collectively respond to those challenges will, in turn, define the state of our industry in the coming years.

12 **What's Over the Horizon for Technical Communication and Its Professional Association?**
By Chris Lyons
Acknowledging that the field is changing and that the change is accelerating, STC's CEO offers insights from the association's perspective on the state of the field. He focuses on the growing job areas and the updated skills needed and he explains how STC must also adapt to meet the needs of its members and the field.

15 **Technical Communication: State of the Industry**
By Bernard Aschwanden
In answering the question, "what is the role of technical communication teams within businesses, governments, and nonprofits?", STC's current president asserts that the core reason technical communication exists is to help deliver services and generate revenue. In a fast-paced industry, he offers us a clear way to differentiate ourselves in our jobs and then collect the rewards.

18 **The United Nations of Content**
By Jack Molisani
The author argues that technical communicators should have an equal space at the business table, along with other content silos like marketing, technical support, training, etc., to create a "United Nations of Content." Using data from his own staffing and conference businesses, alongside an Adobe survey on trends in structured authoring, he provides some evidence for techcomm involvement at the enterprise level.

Build a Better Workplace

Graduate Programs in
Organizational Performance and Workplace Learning

OPWL Students Won the 2014 ISPI Case Study Competition!

Accredited • Award-Winning Graduates • Workplace Focused

Earn the OPWL Master's Degree to:

- Build the skills necessary to improve workplace performance in ways that organizations value
- Work on actual instructional design, needs assessment, evaluation, and research projects for real clients
- Engage in individual learning within a community of practice

Upgrade your skills with a Certificate in these areas:

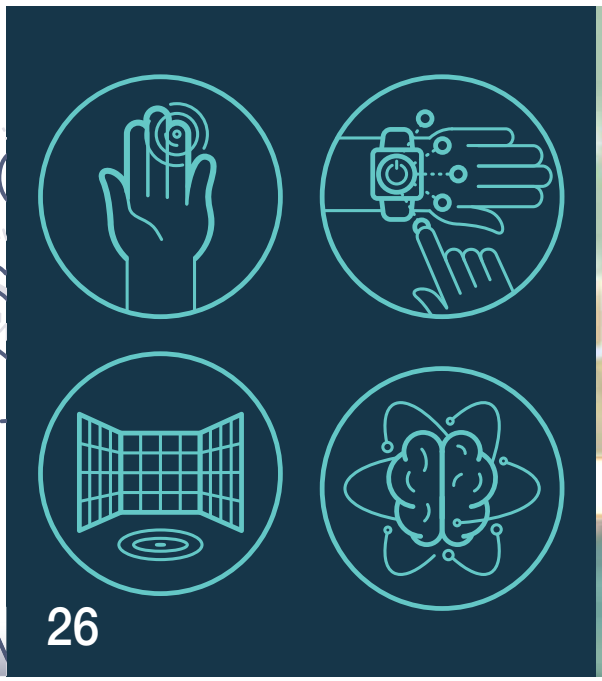
- Performance Improvement
- Instructional Design
- E-Learning Development

Get Started Today!

(208) 426-2489
jfenner@boisestate.edu
opwl.boisestate.edu/stc

APPLY NOW FOR FALL

BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY



SOCIETY PAGES

22 Community Achievement Award Applications Due 29 January 2016

23 Details on the 2016 Summit Official Hotel
By Molly Jin

24 The *2014–2015 Salary Database* Is Now Available for Download and Purchase

25 *Technical Communication* Initiates Cover Competition

COLUMNS

EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

26 An Overview: Where We Have Been and Where We Are Going
By Jeanette Evans and Charles Dull

THE ACADEMIC CONVERSATION

28 Social Media, Technical Communication, and the Academic Conversation
By Thomas Barker

DEPARTMENTS

FYI

31 Mark Your Calendar
Organization Events Across the Globe

MY JOB

32 How "Jill" Landed Her Dream TechComm Career
By Marilyn Woelk

ADVERTISERS

C3, 4 Adobe

2 Boise State University

C2 Doc-To-Help

C4 MadCap Software

30 STC Membership

25 STC Salary Database

17 STC Summit

Easily distribute your content as mobile apps

Announcing the 2015 release of Adobe FrameMaker

Right-to-left language support | Native mobile publishing | Simplified XML authoring | Smoother Word import

Upgrade to the new Adobe FrameMaker (2015 release) for just US$399.00

Try Now | Request Demo | Request Info

"In recent years, even large publications groups have combined most technical communication functions into one role. Fortunately, Adobe FrameMaker gives us tools to reuse content from subject matter experts (like Microsoft Word content mapping), importing of video and interactive content, automatic TOC and index maintenance, and publishing to a wide array of electronic formats, including mobile apps for iOS and Android. Using thoughtful templates and settings files, FrameMaker gives us an end-to-end publishing system that can't be beat!"

—Matt Sullivan, Independent Certified Adobe Instructor

Take Advantage of Free Gold Support for 30-day Trial

Call 800-833-6687
(Monday-Friday, 5am-7pm PST)

Adobe, the Adobe logo, and FrameMaker are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Adobe Systems Incorporated in the United States and/or other countries.
© 2015 Adobe Systems Incorporated. All rights reserved.

A Note from the Editor

WHAT DEFINES AN INDUSTRY, a profession or occupation, or a discipline? Where do you think technical communication fits within those definitions? Is it an industry or a professional discipline within an industry? In soliciting articles for this issue of *Intercom*, I asked four industry leaders to consider these questions and to define their views on the state of technical communication going into 2016.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, technical writers are a part of the professional and business services supersector and fall under the professional, scientific, and technical services industry sector—a tertiary sector of the economy requiring special training in the arts or sciences. Although technical communicators are not required to hold professional licenses like architects, auditors, engineers, doctors, and lawyers, their work involves providing specialist support to businesses of all sizes and in all sectors. The articles in this issue all support the BLS classification in some way. And they also all challenge the boundaries the BLS places upon a technical writer/communicator position.

Saul Carliner, an active and long-time STC member, Fellow, and past STC President, has written an article that provides detailed background on the past three epochs of the profession and describes the nature of the transformation we face in the fourth. He then identifies four challenges raised by that shift—whom to include as technical communicators, what competencies technical communicators need for success, how to promote the value of our contributions and what a professional association's role should be in serving technical communicators.

Picking up on Carliner's fourth point, STC's CEO Chris Lyons explains the challenges facing a professional association like STC in a fast-paced field. He emphasizes studies in *Technical Communication* and STC's *Salary Database* as examples of how an association meets its members' needs, but he also asserts that STC will do more to provide empirical data on the field.

Like Lyons, current STC President Bernard Aschwanden also claims that technical communication is more than the sum of skills found in a job description. He defines what technical communicators are doing today, where he believes we are headed, what's trending, and how we will get there.

Jack Molisani, an STC Fellow and owner of ProSpring Technical Staffing and the LavaCon Conference, shares what he has learned from his conference and his job as a recruiter of content professionals. Using an Adobe survey on the state of structured authoring, he explains how companies have shifted from requiring knowledge of a specific tool and look more for core techcomm skills. He agrees with Carliner's statement that collaboration and the need to embrace silos is part of the change required for growth, but he also suggests that technical communicators must first gain an equal seat at the enterprise business table like a "United Nations of Content."

What all of these articles have in common is certainty that there is job growth and change in the field, especially in the skills technical communicators use and need. They also lament a lack of empirical data to back up the anecdotal evidence. Next year will be an exciting time to watch the field of technical communication continue to evolve, and I challenge all of us to document those changes publically, either through *Intercom* of *Technical Communication* articles, blog posts, or other means. Please send your feedback on where you think the field is headed!

And many thanks to Adobe for sponsoring this important issue.

Liz Pohland

—Liz Pohland
liz.pohland@stc.org

intercom

Intercom, the magazine of the Society for Technical Communication, is published to provide practical examples and applications of technical communication that will promote its readers' professional development.

Publisher Society for Technical Communication
Editor Elizabeth E. (Liz) Pohland
Assistant Editor James Cameron

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Scott Abel, *Meet the Change Agents*
Andrea Ames, *The Strategic IA*
Thomas Barker, *The Academic Conversation*
Nicky Bleiel, *The Essentials*
Jeanette Evans and Charles Dull, *Emerging Technologies*
Ray Gallon, *Standard Deviation*
Linda Roberts and Lisa Cook, *All Access*
Derek Ross, *Ethics*
Kirk St.Amant, *Student Perspectives*
Kirk St.Amant, *Working Locally, Communicating Globally*
Brian Still, *Trends in Usability*

EDITORIAL ADVISORY PANEL
Beth Agnew, Nicky Bleiel, Barrie Byron, Liz Herman (Chair), Alan Houser

STC BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Officers
Bernard Aschwanden, *President*
Adriane Hunt, *Vice President*
Kit Brown-Hoekstra, *Immediate Past President*
Jane Wilson, *Treasurer*
Alyssa Fox, *Secretary*
Directors Craig Baehr, Charles Fisher, Ray Gallon, Cindy Pao

SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION
9401 Lee Highway, Suite 300
Fairfax, VA 22031-1803
+1(703) 522-4114 | +1(703) 522-2075 fax
Send questions and correspondence to the editor at the above address. General information about STC: stc@stc.org *or* www.stc.org.

Address Changes: membership@stc.org
Intercom Editorial: intercom@stc.org

Reprint Permissions: www.copyright.com
Intercom (ISSN 0164-6206) is published 10 times a year (monthly, except for August and December) by the Society for Technical Communication, 9401 Lee Highway, Suite 300, Fairfax, VA 22031-1803, a nonprofit educational organization, as a service to its membership. Membership in STC includes a subscription to **Intercom**. Periodicals postage paid at Fairfax, VA, and additional offices.
Postmaster Send address changes to **Intercom**, Attn: Membership, c/o Society for Technical Communication, 9401 Lee Highway, Suite 300, Fairfax, VA 22031-1803.

Copyright © 2015 by the Society for Technical Communication. All rights reserved. Printed in the USA.

All articles in **Intercom** are copyrighted by the authors unless otherwise indicated. Anyone interested in reprints, reproductions, or reuse must contact the authors for permission.

To advertise in **Intercom**, contact Stacey O'Donnell at *stacey.odonnell@stc.org*, Society for Technical Communication, 9401 Lee Highway, Suite 300, Fairfax, VA 22031.
Ph: +1(703) 522-4114; Fax: +1(703) 522-2075.

shutterstock.com/alphaspirit

Technical Communication at a Crossroads

By SAUL CARLINER | *STC Fellow*

AT THE FIRST STC CONFERENCE I attended in 1983, I eavesdropped on a group of more experienced professionals. I couldn't avoid it. They were talking loud and what they said concerned me: the only "real" technical writers were hardware writers.

I soon learned that they were hardware writers and, in those years immediately following the successful introduction of the IBM Personal Computer, found themselves surrounded by an influx of software technical writers and, I suspect, started to feel supplanted by them.

Just as those hardware technical writers found themselves in the midst of a transformation in 1983, so technical communicators find ourselves in the midst of a transformation today. In this article, I first describe the nature of the transformation we face, and then identify four challenges raised by that shift. How we collectively respond to those challenges will, in turn, define the state of our industry in the coming years.

A Bit of Perspective

Although technical communicators regularly deal with change (indeed, our work depends on changing technologies and their resulting impact on products, services, and operations), history provides the best perspective on what these changes really represent—evolutionary adjustments or revolutionary disruption.

Technical communication seems to have gone through four epochs. The first began during World War II, fueled by increasingly complex military equipment launched onto the battlefields of that war, and the subsequent growth of complex industrial equipment including the first mainframe computers. This epoch is characterized by the emergence of the profession, including the founding of the organizations that became the Society for Technical Communication and the IEEE Professional Communication Society, the first academic programs in technical communication, and the launching of the first peer-reviewed literature in our field: the profession's body of knowledge. Toward the end of this epoch, some of the key research that continues to guide the design and development of technical content today was published, including the *Guidelines for Document Designers* by the American Institutes for Research and companion research about the writing process conducted by Carnegie Mellon University. During this epoch, technical communicators—most of whom started in technical roles like service representatives—communicated complex technical material from product developers to similarly "technical" users.

By the late 1970s to early 1980s, a new generation of consumer electronics burst onto the scene, especially the 1981 launch of the IBM Personal Computer—which popularized PCs—and the 1984 launch of the Apple Macintosh, which pioneered easy-to-use graphical—or visual—computer interfaces. Although some technical communicators continued to write for high-end technical users, the majority of technical communicators, including the burgeoning numbers of people joining the field, wrote

for end users of PC software. These technical communicators not only had to explain how to use the software, but they also had to help PC novices feel comfortable with computers. This massive effort to move the working public online required a different type of communicator: one who either had one of the growing numbers of degrees in the discipline or a similar communications or humanities discipline. Personal computers played a second role during this epoch. Not only did technical communicators write about them, but with word processing, graphic production, and desktop publishing capabilities, they also served as the tools to perform our jobs. In response to these tools, technical communicators not only wrote, we increasingly produced our own work. The growth of the profession led to growth in our professional societies. STC membership typically grew 5 to 10% annually during this epoch.

Both of these epochs were characterized by general stability. That would end with the close of the second epoch in the early 1990s, when the end of the Cold War shifted economies from a military to a consumer focus. Many hardware technical writers, who continued to remain employed writing military specifications through the second epoch, found themselves out of work, and the ranks of technical communicators started to thin. Organizations designed better products that users found intuitive, thus requiring less documentation. By the early 2000s, most people who needed to move online had done so, reducing demand for technical communication that comforted computer novices. Of the content that remained, organizations began publishing it online and the communicators who wrote the content also produced it. Demand for desktop publishing professionals, many of whom identified as technical communicators, plummeted. This period was characterized by booms, like the dot-com boom, and busts, like the Great Recession. The recession not only affected technical communication, it devastated all branches of professional communication. In response, many communicators started publishing information on the Web for free as a means of attracting attention and clients.

The Internet not only disrupted professional communication, it also disrupted professional organizations. Traditionally, people joined professional organizations for their publications. With so much information available for free on the Internet now, professional organizations had to provide practicing professionals with new reasons to affiliate.

Now technical communication enters its fourth epoch, redefining itself for a time when computers and the Internet are ubiquitous. This means that the material for which organizations need technical communicators has changed, and in an epoch when people are adopting new professional identities and new ways to express them, sometimes these needs are outside the traditional framework of a professional association. These conditions, in turn, suggest the challenges our field faces.

Challenge 1. Whom do we include as technical communicators?

Several groups of people have self-identified as technical communicators in the past. The majority write materials for people who use products or service them and produce materials such as online help systems, user guides, reference manuals, service guides, documentation of Application Programming Interfaces and Software Development Kits, and the "inner workings" of complex products. These are the bread-and-butter assignments of our field. People who edit these materials and manage the projects also identify as technical communicators, as do some of the people who provide illustrations for these materials. A second group of people who identify as technical communicators design and develop documentation and training for proprietary software: that is, complex software that organizations either develop or tailor for use internally. A third group works in engineering and scientific firms, primarily compiling and editing proposals that land contracts for these firms and the reports resulting from the engagements. A fourth group works in government agencies, formulating policies and reports for the public.

The literature on technical communication has tried to expand the horizons of technical communication beyond these industries and roles. Some focuses on genres that require an understanding of technology and communication, but are not traditionally associated with technical communicators, such as training materials, marketing communications materials, and policies and procedures. Some of this literature focuses on roles other than writing, such as user interface design and quality control. Some of this literature focuses on industries that have little representation among our membership but need technical communication skills, such as health communication and citizen communication.

But over the past decade, some groups of people who had previously identified as technical communicators chose to identify as something else. In some instances, that's because their job responsibilities substantially changed and they don't create content anymore. More frequently, communicators continue to develop the same type of material but choose to identify by other less-specific terms like content developer and professional communicator, intended to position them for broader opportunities if technical communication assignments dry up, as they have in the past years. Content developers might develop user guides, but they do so for a game or self-assembled furniture in addition to software. Professional communicators might write about technology, but work on sales materials that are just as likely to address sales techniques as product information.

As the number of people self-identifying as full-time professional technical communicators has thinned, a new population of professionals who produce technical content but do not call themselves technical communicators has emerged. Some are full-time communicators, including

journalists and authors of third-party materials about technology products. Some are part-time communicators: the subject matter experts (SMEs) and expert users whose primary job affiliation is in another role such as programmer or engineer, but generously contribute to SME- and user-generated documentation.

Given that some people who have self-identified in the past as technical communicators find that definition limiting and that others might be technical communicators without realizing it, the challenge of the next epoch is recalibrating our definition of what characterizes a technical communicator, shifting from those who produce the "bread and butter" assignments to the nature of the subject matter covered.

Challenge 2: What competencies does a technical communicator really need to succeed?

As part of the effort to recalibrate the definition of a technical communicator, we also need to recalibrate the competencies needed to succeed in this profession. Central to that recalibration effort is a re-envisioning of the concept "technical" from an emphasis on skills with the ability to manipulate production technology to expertise in the technical material of the content about which technical communicators write.

That the focus of "technical" in technical communication drifted toward the technology of publishing is understandable. Between the second and third epochs in the development of the field, the means of producing and publishing organizational content drastically changed as organizations adjusted first to desktop publishing, then to online help, then to Web publishing, and eventually to mobile, e-book, and component content management systems. The first of these developments shifted responsibility for production from desktop publishing specialists to content developers, adding illustration (or, at least, adaptation of existing images), graphic design, layout, and preparation of golden code and camera-ready copy to the job descriptions of technical communicators. The tools of production added to the complexity of publishing tasks, as technical communicators moved from typewriters to online tools and had to not only explain computers to people who never encountered them, but also had to become master users themselves. That some job ads requested experience with specific versions of authoring tools only reinforced the emphasis on publishing technology and the belief that mastering publishing technology was what made technical communication "technical."

Two things have changed. One is that the transition to computers that consumed technical communication in the 1980s and 1990s is effectively complete. Furthermore, most software (mobile and desktop) now follows standard interface conventions and operate similarly. This rise of intuitive interfaces for computer-experienced end users has caused demand for end-user content for inexperienced computer novices to plummet.

The second thing that has changed is that functions and features of products are increasingly intuitive, minimizing or eliminating learning for new products. Rather, users need guidance in applying those functions and features within particular contexts. Consider documentation of smart boards—screens that not only let people display PowerPoint slides and Web pages, but also are touch sensitive and can be used for group activities. Users easily figure out how to use smart boards for projecting slides without consulting help or receiving any training. But most are stumped for ideas on how to take advantage of the touch screen and interactive capabilities in their specific contexts, such as business presentations, technical training classes, sixth-grade math classes, and undergraduate history seminars. Some organizations have turned to SMEs and users to provide this type of contextualized material.

Perhaps these organizations lack staff to prepare it; perhaps these organizations do not believe their staff communicators can do so. One way organizations show their lack of trust in the subject matter expertise of technical communicators is requiring approvals of materials by technical "owners" before publication. That type of approval is not necessarily standard in other communication disciplines. For example, many organizations do not require similar sign-offs on training; trainers themselves have responsibility for the accuracy of their materials.

In addition to subject matter expertise, technical communicators also need excellent communication skills. Or, as one leading technical writer once observed, "When did we stop making writing important?" Once again, trainers provide some insights into this challenge. They, too, require subject matter expertise and excellent communication skills. Studies that identified characteristics that make a trainer credible suggest that both skills are of nearly equally important—neither dominates.

Technical communicators need a third set of skills, ones that get limited attention in our field: how to be service providers. Whether we work as captive employees or as contractors or consultants, technical communicators provide a service. Those who work externally are well aware of the pressures of keeping clients happy. But even those who work internally must keep internal clients satisfied as organizations usually view technical communication as a support service. As a study of how technical communication managers report productivity and effectiveness that appeared in the third quarter 2014 issue of *Technical Communication* noted: upper management typically assesses technical communication groups on word-of-mouth about their service skills, rather than better covered—but almost never tracked—means like return on investment or results of customer satisfaction surveys.

Service skills are the competencies that affect word-of-mouth. One of those skills is consultative skills: collaboratively working with an internal or external sponsor to arrive at decisions about projects instead of approaching communication as a territory to be protected. In practical

terms, although communication is our area of expertise, telling a client "I'm a communication expert and that's my decision" doesn't make them believe it. Applying interpersonal communication skills—which substantially differ from written communication skills—to arrive at a shared understanding of an approach makes a much stronger and more positive impression, and builds respect.

Another service skill is the ability to assess the quality, cost, and timeliness of the service and to recognize when adjustments are needed to assure competitiveness. Even technical communicators working internally need these skills because, as a support service, the option of outsourcing or relocating the group to a less expensive location always exists.

Challenge 3: How do we promote the value of our contributions to sponsors and prospective sponsors?

We should position technical communication as a valuable, central service that positively benefits organizations that invest in it. But we need to be pragmatic; after decades of telling ourselves our value, most of us continue to fight an uphill battle to demonstrate the centrality of technical communication to organizations.

Even when technical communicators find a senior manager to advocate for the function, too often the primary support is limited to that single advocate, and when that manager leaves the role, the replacement may or may not share the same opinion of technical communication.

The issue poses even greater challenges to technical communicators working as contractors or consultants, and for third-party service providers. Clients often call in technical communicators at the last minute and primarily seek production services—services that are cost-sensitive as an increasingly large number of providers offer them. In such situations, the contractors have tightly bound assignments that do not effectively showcase their skills. That the "technical" in technical communication has primarily referred to skills with publishing tools has only contributed to this situation.

Although no simple, quick program can permanently change minds, a number of measures exist that, if adopted in part or full, could begin to change perceptions of the field over time. The first was mentioned earlier: by necessity, technical communicators need to shift the focus of "technical" from publishing technology to expertise with subject matter and content. This expertise not only allows technical communicators to better showcase the full range of our expertise, it is also not as easily duplicated as publishing skills. Furthermore, determining how to communicate a subject requires earlier involvement in the document's development than mere assistance with wordsmithing, layout, or production.

A second measure is education. Senior technical communication managers, senior strategists, and senior communicators who work internally need to institutionalize their functions. Rather than looking for a single champion in their organizations—a situation that, as noted earlier, only lasts as long as the champion remains in the position—technical communication managers, senior strategists, and senior communicators need resources to help them strategically insert themselves into development processes at appropriate junctures, and build that role into the processes and policies that govern their organizations, so when the champion leaves, the role remains.

When internal technical communicators institutionalize their work, external providers benefit, too, because those same organizations seek external help when their own staffs are not available. External providers, in turn, need to be able to provide these other services when demand arises.

The third measure is an external effort to market the value of technical communication to the people who purchase the service. Other professional associations provide models to consider. For example, the Society for Human Resource Management sponsors a popular U.S. National Public Radio show, and the sponsorship message provides an opportunity to "sell" the strategic value of Human Resources (which—like technical communication—many organizations view as a support service and frequently outsource it). Although technical communicators probably lack the financial resources to run a radio campaign, they can still promote the value of their services to sponsors through social media campaigns, client-focused sections of websites (the British Design Council provides an excellent, marketing-focused site), as well as through articles and opinion pieces aimed at sponsors of technical communication projects and that appear in news sources and blogs frequented by sponsors.

In other words, rather than merely telling other technical communicators that we provide value, we need to take the message to the people who can purchase technical communication services.

Challenge 4: What is the role of a professional association serving technical communicators?

The fourth challenge facing the profession is a reimagination of one of our most fundamental institutions—the professional association. People in our field originally founded associations to provide a forum for sharing common work-related interests, strengthening the practices of a then-emerging profession, and ultimately providing distinction to those who practice the field. The founders established publications and conferences to strengthen practice and, in the process of doing so, forged strong social bonds with one another. As a result, professional associations doubled as social clubs. Colleagues attended chapter meetings and annual conferences as much to catch up with old friends as to learn new tricks of the trade. Membership grew rapidly in the second epoch and part of the third epoch.

In the third epoch, however, several developments challenged professional associations. One was the shift

from life-long careers with single employers to *protean careers*—careers in which workers move from position to position and focus on building their inventory of skills rather than acquiring seniority. With more technical communicators working independently and others regularly changing employers, many found themselves responsible for the annual dues that employers previously covered. Some people maintained their memberships, seeing it as a tangible demonstration of commitment to the field. Others dropped their memberships, spending their money on other things. That affected total membership numbers.

The second development was the rise of private, for-profit organizations. Through the early 1990s, nearly all conferences and events on technical communication were sponsored by professional associations. By the late-1990s, several private conferences became "must attend" events on the annual circuit.

But perhaps the most significant development was the rise of the Internet and, along with it, private blogs and websites dedicated to the discussion of technical communication. Although some of these blogs and sites are primarily intended to market a service to employers or recruit prospective contractors, some of the best known blogs and websites are merely a means of sharing their interest in technical communication, starting with the Tech Writer's List (TECHWR-L), which started as an online discussion list. These blogs and sites provide information about the field and, for some, filled the same need as the publications that come with membership in a professional association. That is no small issue because surveys of members of professional associations repeatedly indicated that publications were the primary benefit members sought. If visitors to the site wanted to interact with one another, many arranged for local meet-ups, duplicating the services of local chapters of professional associations. Some technical communicators felt blogs and websites met their professional needs at no cost.

To remain relevant in this epoch, professional associations need to be reimagined. This challenge is not unique to associations serving technical communicators: professional associations serving most professions—especially those related to communication—face the same challenge.

Professional associations can still play a crucial role in building and promoting professions, even in areas where they now face competition. For example, although their publications compete with privately published blogs and websites, publication by a professional association still brings credibility to material. Some interesting models have emerged in partnership with universities, such as *j-source.ca*, a project of the Canadian Journalism Project, which explores the economic and financial dimensions of the field, as well as its changing practices and ethics. Associations can leverage that credibility by commissioning and publishing applied research in the field, such as a census of practitioners and state-of-the-industry reports. Professional associations might use similar thinking to reenvision conferences and meetings, and geographic and virtual communities.

If professional associations face competition for some of their core services, they are uniquely positioned to offer others. One is promoting the profession to the organizations that purchase the service and their leaders. Only when they change their view of our services can we deliver them in ways we believe are most effective. Too often, associations primarily focus their messages internally within the profession.

Another service that professional associations can provide is identifying and promoting the competencies underlying the field. The competencies exist for more than certification; they also provide a sound basis for job descriptions, performance plans, and performance appraisals. When promoting competencies, professional associations should focus on all of these applications.

In addition to identifying and promoting the competencies underlying the field, professional associations can also identify and promote the standards of competence. Certification does that. Effective certification is performance based, not seniority based. So it is possible that someone who has 30 years of service might not be certified, because that person cannot demonstrate that they perform at a minimum level of competence. After receiving certification, professionals must continue to perform satisfactorily and within a code of ethics, or they could face loss of their credential, even if they have been a long-time volunteer of the organization. Proponents like performance-based standards for certification as long as the possibility of failing affects other people. But some of those "other people" will be us and those enforcing the standards are their "friends."

In Other Words

As technical communication moves into the next epoch, what makes a "real" technical communicator changes again, just as it did in each of the previous epochs. For success in the next epoch, the profession faces four key challenges as individual professionals and as a community. If we rise to these challenges, they could change the focus of our work, and provide a more meaningful role in organizations, including stronger professional standards: the same things we have sought since our first epoch.

SAUL CARLINER *is an associate professor of educational technology and provost's fellow for digital learning at Concordia University in Montreal. He has received the Ken Rainey Award for Excellence in Research, the Jay Gould Award for Excellence in Teaching, the STC President's Award, two awards of Distinguished Chapter Service, and seven awards in the Frank R. Smith Competition for Best Article in Technical Communication. He is a fellow of the Institute for Performance and Learning (formerly Canadian Society for Training and Development) and a fellow and past president of STC.*

What's Over the Horizon for Technical Communication and Its Professional Association?

By CHRIS LYONS | *STC Executive Director*

shutterstock.com/totallyPic.com

THE SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION (STC), in operation for over 62 years with a global membership, can rightly claim to be the preeminent association in the field of technical communication. That being the case, one should expect that STC would have some insights to offer on the state of the field. One easy-to-come-by insight is that the field is changing and that the change is accelerating. But what does that mean? What are the growing job areas? What skills are needed? And along with that, how is STC changing to meet the needs of its members and the field?

The Challenge

Although fairly straightforward questions, delivering solid insights is not easy. Technical communication as a field is most easily embraced as a common set of training among practitioners. Technical communicators work in all industries at multiple levels. They have a variety of responsibilities in their work. They have a wide assortment of job titles. While we have current empirical data that gives us understanding into the state of field, the data's limitations also make it unable to illuminate the very important changes to the field that STC hears anecdotally. A lack of firm information on changes to technical communication skills and careers makes it equally difficult for STC to respond to those changes.

What's Been Done

Two current surveys do a good job of profiling the employment of "standard" technical writer and technical communicator jobs. The first is STC's annual *Salary Database* of U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics employment data. This database, available free to all current STC members, looks at the year-to-year changes in employment numbers, salaries, and locations of workers categorized in the broad, government-approved definition of "technical writer." The second survey is an article in the November 2015 issue of the *Technical Communication* journal, "The Evolution of Technical Communication: An Analysis of Industry Job Postings" by Eva Brumberger and Clair Lauer. Their research dissects almost 1,000 U.S. technical communication job postings over a two-month period to detail position titles, location, salary, industry, and other parameters.

Both of these surveys have broadly similar findings. They both determined that the average upper salary for technical communication jobs was in the high $70,000s. They both found that the majority of jobs were in California and Texas. And both found that the largest number of jobs were

in the Information Technology Services/Software sector (Brumberger/Lauer) or, as defined by the BLS in the *Salary Database*, Computer Systems Design and Related Services. The correlation between these data sets is solid information to those in or entering the field about the places they need to be, the skills they need to have, and their paycheck expectations.

However, both of these surveys are limited in their view and are missing important developments in the field. This is no secret, as both surveys describe the limitations of their methodologies. In its discussion of employment, the *Salary Database* states:

> It should be noted that there are some limitations to the employment figures provided by the BLS. While the OES survey gives occupational descriptions for each occupation type, there is still the likelihood of the employment numbers being under-reported. In cases where a technical writer may have skillsets which overlap into multiple profession types, there is no certainty that the respondent will label that individual as a technical writer. STC estimates that there are nearly 600 college-level programs dedicated to technical communication. With graduates being produced from many institutions, there is an inconsistency between the numbers reported by the BLS and the likely higher, "true" employment statistics. (page 11)

The analysis of jobs by Brumberger and Lauer has a similar caveat:

> An initial examination of the job descriptions, required education, and desired skill set for these advertisements enabled us to cull duplicate postings as well as postings that were not related to technical communication. We also discarded jobs that were focused primarily on technical/tools work rather than rhetorical work because it is the rhetorical work that is at the heart of technical communication. So, for example, if a posting indicated that the job responsibilities were almost exclusively coding, with little or no design, writing, or client-side communication, then we discarded the job. Additionally, we removed jobs requiring a high level of experience and skills with complex back-end object-oriented programming languages (for example, Java, PHP, C+, Perl), because most graduates of technical communication programs would not have these skills, nor are they at the center of technical communication work. (page 228)

What these caveats tell us is that both the *Salary Database* and the job posting survey did not factor into their research the rise of technical communication jobs that require a hybrid set of skills.

Jobs requiring a hybrid set of skills—technical communication plus something else—are clearly increasing. Although STC currently has no empirical way of measuring this change, we can see it happening in several areas. One area is "content marketing." This is a content strategy that eschews the normal sales pitch and instead feeds customers a consistent set of useful information on a product. It communicates a uniform message that links front end marketing to user help or technical specifications. Content marketing requires a hybrid skill set. Practitioners need both technical communication and marketing skills.

Product development for online services is another hybrid area. Companies like Facebook and Google hire information developers who have a mix of technical communication skills and coding skills. In 2014, the Google recruiter at the STC Summit in Phoenix was specifically looking for technical communicators with Java experience—a hybrid skill set. For these types of companies, product teams include technical writers at their formation. Since their product is typically an enhancement to their online service or an analysis of some aspect of the service, every effort touches on coding. The writer needs to be able to participate in the building of the product, not just describe what it does or how to use it on the back end.

A third anecdotal data point is the group of science graduate students running ComSciCon (*www.comscicon.com*). They have created a highly successful series of workshops centered on "communicating science"—teaching graduate students in the hard sciences how to communicate their efforts and developments to the public. The conference focuses primarily on what STC members would regard as basic technical communication skills. The impetus for their workshops was the realization that they would not be as successful in their careers if they couldn't clearly communicate in speeches or in articles what they are doing and why it matters. In fact, the entire STEM effort can be said to hinge on the ability to enthuse young people to focus on hard science majors by communicating clearly to them about what is interesting and engaging in the STEM fields. How many fields are including technical communication skills as needed skills for the job? A guess would be: ANY job that is part of a value chain.

There are some "chicken and egg" causality dilemmas to jobs with hybrid skills. Is the key adding marketing to technical communication skills or technical communication to marketing skills? What comes first, coding or technical writing? It may not matter. What is of concern to me as a representative at STC is that we do not have a good way of understanding how many "new" professions are developing over the fault lines between disciplines. How much demand is there for these skill sets? We don't really know. The surveys mentioned earlier in this article purposely do not try to analyze these types of positions. There is no good data yet to analyze.

What STC Can Do

The Society for Technical Communication exists to provide value to its members. Certainly analyzing and reporting on the development of hybrid skill sets to work in certain fields would be of great value. This analysis has obvious

implications for our members looking for a new job, the type of additional training they might decide to pursue, and where they should live. Academia is also very interested in better understanding skills in high demand. A recent survey of programs in the United States by Lisa Meloncon of the University of Cincinnati counted almost 600 college-level programs, graduating thousands of students each year. Each of these programs wants to tailor their curriculum so that their graduates have the skills needed to become employed quickly. There is already some criticism that college programs do not do enough to teach students to use common tools and methodologies in the field. What if they are also missing major areas of study like basic coding? STC itself must better understand changes to the field or the needs of our members will diverge from the value STC offers.

STC does not need to understand the full scope of the field's changes or even have quantitative analysis in order to start addressing them. We know change is happening, and our efforts to adjust as members' needs change may not be a true bullseye without some hard data, but that is no excuse for an association to be standing still. In fact, by engaging, STC will be developing insights and data itself. How will STC achieve this?

Professional certification is a good example of our approach. The Certified Professional Technical Communicator (CPTC) program is reopening at the end of 2015. The Foundation-level certification focuses on knowledge of the field. That is knowledge of the field of *technical communication* not technical communication plus some other field or skill. The Foundation exam tests knowledge in nine core skill areas. We certainly expect many of our members and practitioners to seek Foundation certification; however, our marketing plan is not limited to the technical communicator community or students. By using a global vendor, STC will be publicizing the program to many people in many fields around the world. We expect to find people from other fields studying for and taking the Foundation exam—maybe marketing professionals or graduate students in hard sciences. Over time, we expect the demographic data we collect through the certification program to add to our understanding of other fields that benefit from technical communication skills.

Similarly, and as a direct result of feedback from attendee and member surveys, we have been introducing STC-hosted webinars, classes, and *Intercom* articles on software development-related subjects such as API development and the Agile methodology. Demand for these topics has been strong. We are considering hosting a pre-conference workshop or even an entire track devoted to programming at our annual Summit. The popularity of these and the survey data we get from attendees will help us understand the need for this training and what types of jobs require it.

Another initiative is to host an event or forum that brings together industry and academia so that managers can define the types of skills they look for when hiring and their relative importance to particular job types. The findings from this type of collaboration would provide very interesting and immediate information on changing and growing roles for technical communicators. We are also surveying the STC Corporate Value Program firms for their input on the skills needed by their employees who are outside of the normal training in technical communication. Again, none of the insights gained will come from a readily available set of data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics or even job postings, but real insights can be developed from these types of combined activities.

In many ways, change is a good problem to have. We live in a content-rich world. Technical communication skills are in demand and becoming an essential part of the skill set needed to be successful in many careers—maybe *every* career. As an association, however, it seems to be increasingly difficult to fully capture and quantify the changes we know are occurring. How can STC, in a single report or survey, competently summarize the huge expansion of career opportunities or the pace of change for our members? We will have to track and report on many data points to draw a picture of the new jobs emerging. How can STC add to or shift its offerings to provide value to its members in the new world of hybrid jobs? We are going to have to sense these changes, adapt, and respond. We need to be agile in developing new programs or changing to respond to member needs. It is really an exciting time for those in the field. Technical communication skills are increasingly desired in many careers and those trained in them are stepping through a gateway that opens to many possible career paths.

What's over the horizon for the field of technical communication? I think the future is so bright, you're gonna have to wear shades.

CHRIS LYONS (chris.lyons@stc.org) *is the Executive Director of STC, a position he has held since 2013. His experience and skills span most aspects of program execution from strategic visioning and initiative scoping to project management and risk mitigation. Prior to joining STC, Chris worked for IBM Global Services and he formed The Fairhaven Group, an independent consultancy focused on assisting associations and nonprofits. He also spent nine years in the Navy as an officer and pilot. He earned a BA in economics from the University of Maryland in 1985 and an MBA from the Sloan School of Business at MIT in 1997.*

REFERENCES

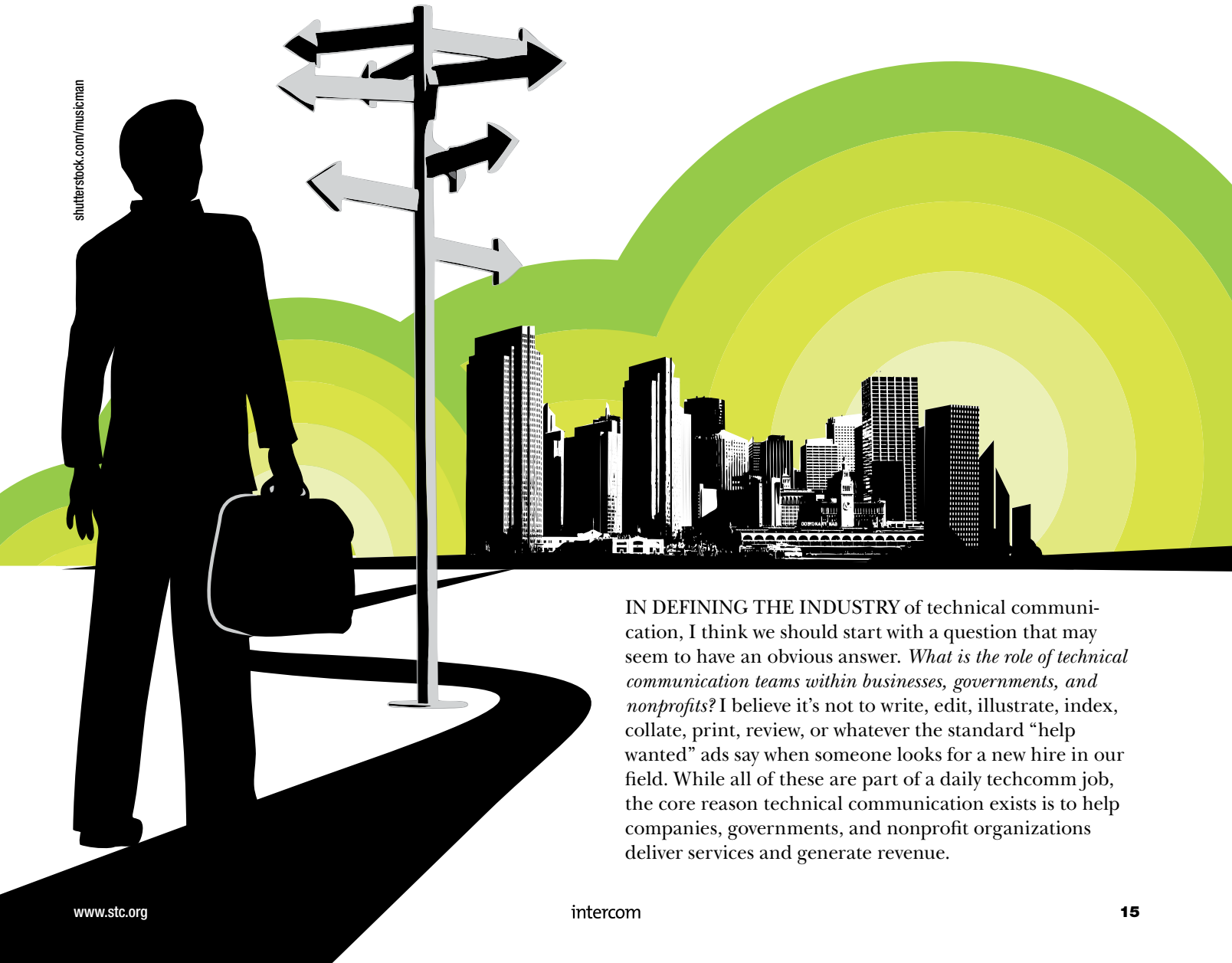
Brumberger, Eva, and Claire Lauer. The Evolution of Technical Communication: An Analysis of Industry Job Postings. *Technical Communication* 62.4 (November 2015): 224–243.

Meloncon, Lisa, and Sally Henschel. Current State of U.S. Undergraduate Defree Programs in Technical and Professional Communication. *Technical Communication* 60.1 (February 2013): 45–64.

Society for Technical Communication. *2014–2015 Salary Database, www.stc.org/publications/products/salary-database.*

Technical Communication: State of the Industry

By BERNARD ASCHWANDEN | *Associate Fellow and 2015–2016 STC President*



shutterstock.com/musicman

IN DEFINING THE INDUSTRY of technical communication, I think we should start with a question that may seem to have an obvious answer. *What is the role of technical communication teams within businesses, governments, and nonprofits?* I believe it's not to write, edit, illustrate, index, collate, print, review, or whatever the standard "help wanted" ads say when someone looks for a new hire in our field. While all of these are part of a daily techcomm job, the core reason technical communication exists is to help companies, governments, and nonprofit organizations deliver services and generate revenue.

Technical communicators are responsible for getting information from few to many, enabling them to achieve specific and often measureable goals. Technical communication is about understanding audiences and ensuring that every part of our work is done to meet the needs of the audience. This includes all aspects of content planning and creation, management of that information, delivery in multiple formats, socializing of the message, and then listening to audience feedback and improving the content, process, and strategy. And our audience, like everything else we deal with, is constantly evolving.

Our industry is evolving in the same way. We've become better at sharing best practices, planning and implementing a strategy, and making the business case to management teams on the benefits of investing in documentation and related content. We are moving away from manual processes to automation, away from just text and images to video and multimedia, and we are collaborating with our own sales, support, development, and management teams. This is all done as we move towards an audience who consumes content not only in print, but online using computers, tablets, and phones. In a literal sense, we are creating and sharing more content in a few weeks or months—to a broader and potentially global audience—than we ever have in the past in months or even years.

Technical communicators improve the entire workflow. We manage content, deliver it, socialize the message, listen to feedback, and in doing so, we make it easier for people to do things that were once so complex they were the domain of experts only. An everlasting role of technical communication is to improve the way the masses do complex things and to make it feel easy.

Where Are We Headed?

Tools and technology continue to come together in ways that help us do more with fewer resources. Outsourcing content creation is a trend that continues to grow, so everyone in our field (regardless of their geographic location) needs to be able to stand out to be noticed. That can mean becoming a name-brand presenter, the "go to" expert, or a video sensation. Another way is with clear recognition through a degree or other mechanism (such as one of many certifications available in our field and the related fields of project management and business analysis).

Aside from the change in skills, there is also a lot of change behind the scenes in technology, workflow, and a growing understanding of the value of content. We still have a long way to go in making a clear business case for content, but major corporations are helping us do just that.

What's Trending?

Leading companies include content as part of their business strategy where the work of a documentation team becomes a powerful tool for generating revenue. For example,

- IBM gave us minimalism in documentation as well as the XML standard called DITA,
- Adobe gave us the Technical Communication Suite,
- Microsoft brought us the ubiquitous Word,
- Apple controls the majority of the world's access to phones and music, and
- Google makes content not only searchable but also findable.

All of these companies value technical communicators. And outdated discussions around cutting costs are less important when we compare the new revenue we can bring in with solid content and best practices. Trends include structured authoring, video, and including documentation as part of an overall revenue generation strategy.

Structured authoring (either as part of a formal workflow with clear style guides and more formal rules, or as XML-based content such as S1000D or DITA) is becoming the new normal. With standard rules in place, it's faster to create content, and it's easier to manage it. Since content is developed around a formulaic system, changes to the content are quick, publishing to multiple formats is simpler, and the ability to reuse materials for unique audiences, products, or platforms is more and more common. From one source we can create many outputs and tailor them to the needs of our varied audiences.

Video as part of a support site has increased in popularity, but taking a standard "installation and configuration" and making it into a video that showcases ease-of-use or best practices means that traditional "how-to"-based content has new life as a part of the sales cycle. A perception of "easier" helps to make the sales decision of today's informed consumer one that can directly tie revenue to quality content. Even a task like installing floor tiles can be rebranded into a sales tool making it seem faster and easier to do, making one product stand out from others. And the source of this? A set of installation instructions, delivered as a video, branded with a company's logo, and made to seem effortless.

Documentation as part of the total sales toolkit means that the "writer" role is evolving and changing into a career that is linked to business processes, user analysis, sales and marketing, and helping to generate revenue for a company. Again, the need to cut costs becomes secondary if you can show that your work generates revenue. By being a broker for the knowledge of an organization, we can break down silos and get teams into clear and consistent communications, and use that collected information to build up sales. That means, in essence, that documentation, when done right, is part of the process of making money, not a cost center.

How Will We Get There?

In order to get to know your audience, plan and create content, manage information, deliver in multiple formats,

communicate with the audience, and then take the feedback to improve the processes, you first need to understand where you are now. This means you need to do a detailed audit of what you have—people, processes, content, tools—and ensure the base metrics are clear and can be understood. You need to know how this all fits into the tactical implementation of your company strategy around, frankly, its potential to bring in money. If you are in government, then your strategy may revolve around services and related ideas, but most corporations work around the goal of generating profits. Once you know where you are and understand where you want to go, it's a lot easier to map the process to get there.

After an audit, compare the current state with the ideal future. Identify what needs to be done and what obstacles are in the way. Figure out how to get past the obstacles and, if there is no other option, find another path to get to the goal (go "over, under, around, or through" them). In some cases it may mean reworking processes or even giving up favorites that often fall under the adages "but we've always done it this way" or "we always include that" or even "but that means we'd have to change/learn/grow." Most of us embrace change, but if you don't, then you may be in for a rude awakening when a business unit fails, is sold, or shuts down because it couldn't adapt. Consider terms in publishing that once were full-time jobs (e.g., typesetters) which today are relegated to a portion of a dialog box. We need to adapt to stay relevant.

After identification of the ideal future, and an understanding of how to get there, you need to start to implement. This could be massive change or smaller steps, but to deliver what is needed today (and tomorrow) there will be changes, so get used to it. Learn more. Don't just learn how to click in a dialog, get to know the logic behind the software changes so that you can own that skill. It's much tougher to outsource thinking, planning, and execution of ideas than it is to outsource page layout, translation, and writing based on notes from others. Become indispensible by showing your value as an agent of change who can help transition documentation to an ideal future where it generates revenue. To paraphrase Jerry Maguire, "show them the money."

Once you begin to build revenue, the rewards continue to be reaped. Need some training? Sure, it's an investment. New tools? No problem, they increase the scope of what can be delivered and generate more sales leads. Want to attend a conference, get certified, or have requests for other department "goodies"? Once you show management that your job isn't to cut costs, it isn't to write, edit, illustrate, index, collate, print, or review, but rather to provide services and generate revenue, it's a LOT faster to get what you need. Remember to show them the money using metrics of where you were, and where you are, and how you are going make your contribution a winning business case.

Summary

Once we know our audiences, the tasks of content planning and creation, content management, delivery in multiple formats, and communications all become easier and faster due to new tools and improved process. However, just like a great toolkit is useless without the skills of an electrician or a plumber, all the shared knowledge we have is of no clear value without a better technical communicator.

Our industry is moving toward a lot of new ideas and the best need to stand out. A clear way to differentiate between experts in our field is through membership in organizations like STC, via clear accreditation, and a proven track record. Get your metrics and present them well, build content that connects with the customer, show the link between content and the bottom line, and then collect the rewards.

BERNARD ASCHWANDEN (bernard@publishingsmarter.com) *is the founder of Publishing Smarter, an STC Associate Fellow, and currently serving as STC President. Bernard has helped hundreds of companies implement successful solutions. He is focused on publishing better, publishing faster, and publishing smarter. He solves problems and helps companies generate more revenue. He guides clients through the best processes to create, manage, and deliver content. Once delivered, he helps them socialize the message, understand and act on feedback, and improve the process and workflow.*

The United Nations of Content

By JACK MOLISANI | *Fellow*

CONFERENCE PROGRAM COMMITTEES (whether for an association conference like the STC Summit or for other industry conferences) face an interesting challenge: choosing sessions in which our audience will be interested months (if not years) in advance of the conference itself. And considering that attendees first have to ask for permission and funds to attend, the challenge then becomes: *In what topics will the audience be interested that are also relevant enough to their employer's corporate goals so their bosses will pay for them to attend?*

This second challenge reminds me of a lesson I learned in a screenplay writing class I took when I first moved to Los Angeles. You have two audiences when writing a screenplay. Eventually people must be interested enough to pay to see the film, but *first* you need a producer interested enough to buy the rights to your script and get it produced.

The same principle applies to building a business case to "sell" your purchase request to management, whether attending a three-day conference or buying an enterprise-wide content management system that will take three years to define and implement.

The third (and hardest) challenge to face when planning a conference program is to keep in mind that there is much in your industry that you *don't* know, to keep your eyes and ears open for new ways to do things, for new ideas and new information—some of which may challenge data that "everyone knows is true." I'll bet you that STC Summit Conference Chair Todd Deluca and STC Director of Education and Meetings Molly Jin are making similar discoveries while producing the 2016 STC Annual Summit—what you (the attendee) needs to know, and why you should attend.

In addition to producing a conference, I'm also a recruiter who specializes in content professionals (technical writers, content strategists, etc.) As a recruiter, I see what skills companies want in the candidates they are hiring (and how many they are hiring), so that also gives me an insight into industry trends. This article summarizes my discoveries in both jobs over the past year.

Job Posting Trends

Before we look at more anecdotal lessons learned, let's investigate some hard numbers on how the job market

shutterstock.com/rassco

has changed over the past decade. I ran an analysis on technical writing and content strategist job postings on the major job boards (CareerBuilder, Monster, and DICE) and then compared the numbers to the same search I did in 2006. (Note: I didn't search for "content strategist" in 2006, but I suspect the results would have been zero as Google shows the term "content strategist" not becoming common until 2010; see Figure 1.)

In Tables 1 and 2, I suspected these "content strategist" jobs were mostly Web content strategy jobs, so I reran the search for "content strategists" jobs with "multichannel" or "multi-channel" as keywords and found the results shown in Table 3. In Tables 3 through 6, which show the addition of skill-based keywords used in job postings, I had anticipated the decrease in the number of technical writing jobs and the decline of online help, WinHelp, HTML Help, etc., but the lack of growth in XML/content management system job requirements took me by surprise since that seems to be a "hot" topic at conferences. How few content strategy jobs included multichannel publishing also surprised me. From this I deduce that, while there is growth in content strategy jobs, the positions are focused on Web content strategy, not multichannel (techcomm and Web) content strategy. And these numbers are very different from Adobe's survey of the state of structured authoring.

The State of Structured Authoring

While most of the content strategy jobs on the job boards are Web-related, there are companies that are adopting true multichannel publishing using content management systems and structured authoring. Praveen Kumar Burri, the product manager for the Adobe Technical Communication Suite, presented a TED-like talk at LavaCon in October 2015 on Trends in Structured Authoring.

The first trend Praveen identified was that 49% of the organizations who participated in the survey are already doing structured authoring, a 30% growth year to year:

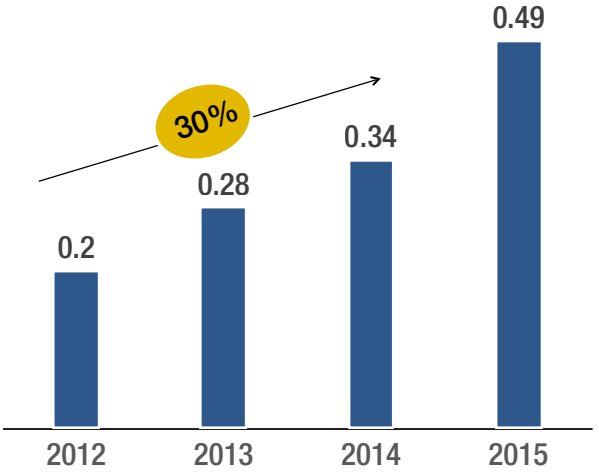


Figure 2. Percent of organizations using structured authoring.

Sources: Adobe survey to STC NA 2012 (N=237), Adobe Tech Comm survey 2013 (N=515), Adobe Tech Comm Survey 2014 (N=1016)

Figure 3 shows, of those already using structured authoring, the standard they prefer. DITA is the most common at 57%.

Figure 1. Popularity of "content strategist" jobs on Google.

Job Board	2006	2015
CareerBuilder	474	230
DICE	833	355
Monster	1,000+	1,000+

Table 1. Number of "technical writer" jobs posted on the major job boards.

Job Board	2006	2015
CareerBuilder	0	43
DICE	0	36
Monster	0	235

Table 2. Number of "content strategist" jobs posted on the major job boards.

Job Board	2006	2015
CareerBuilder	0	1
DICE	0	1
Monster	0	19

Table 3. Number of "content strategist" jobs with "multichannel" as a keyword.

Job Board	2006	2015
CareerBuilder	68	14
DICE	58	36
Monster	195	100

Table 4. Number of "technical writer" jobs with keyword "online help" in the posting.

Job Board	2006	2015
CareerBuilder	35	18
DICE	104	21
Monster	118	85

Table 5. Number of "technical writer" jobs with keyword "XML" in the posting.

Job Board	2006	2015
CareerBuilder	10	11
DICE	22	7
Monster	51	86

Table 6. Number of "technical writer" jobs with keyword "content management" in the posting.

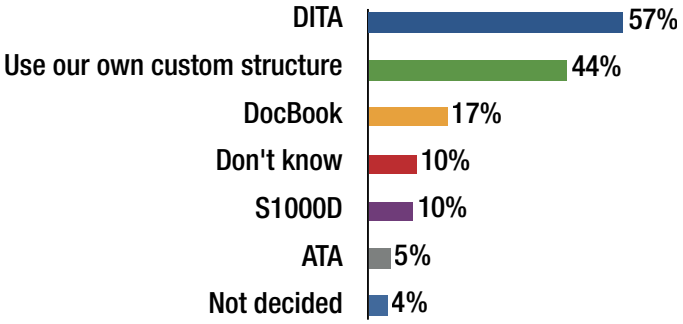
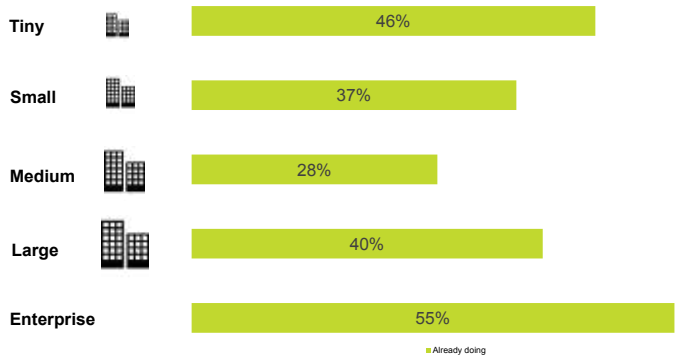


Figure 3. The standards being used within structured authoring.

The slide in Figure 4 shows the size of companies that are currently publishing (or planning to) using structured authoring. Figure 5 reports on the types of deliverables produced and to which outputs they are published.



Tiny = 1–9. Small = 10–99, Medium=100–1K; Large=1–5K; Enterprise > 5K

Figure 4. Company sizes using structured authoring.

Figure 6 shows which outputs were expected to continue to grow, with an increasing percentage reporting mobile publishing.

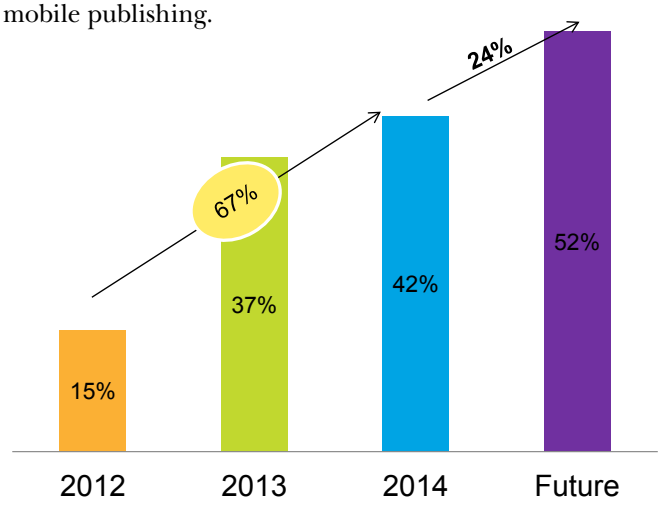


Figure 6. Mobile publishing adoption (percent of respondents).

According to Praveen, companies are moving to structured authoring for the following reasons:

- Efficiency: content reuse
- Conistency: easy to update
- Multichannel Publishing: multiple formats, languages, and platforms
- Cost Savings: translation and content reuse

(For more information on trends in structured authoring, see the recording of Praveen's talk at: *http://tinyurl.com/SATrends.*)

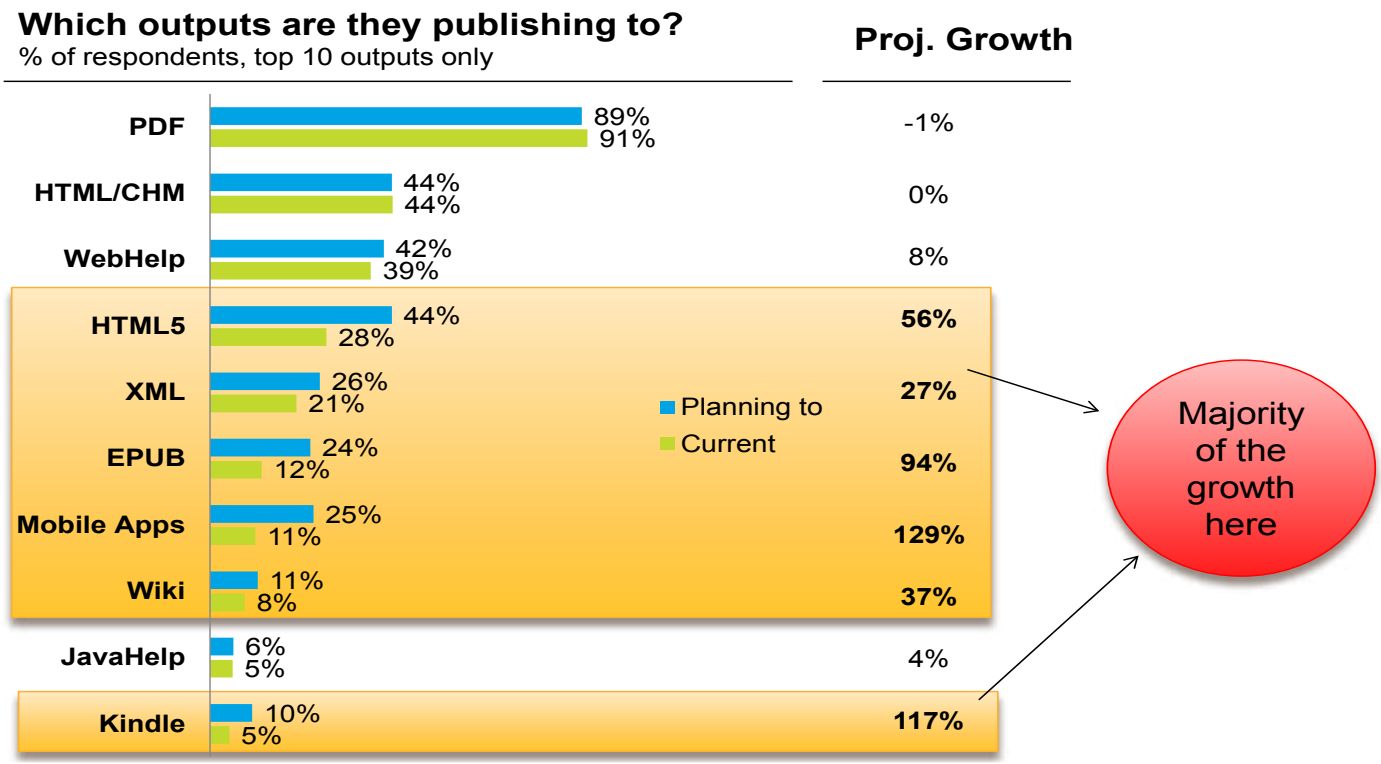

Which outputs are they publishing to?
% of respondents, top 10 outputs only
Proj. Growth
PDF 89% 91% -1%
HTML/CHM 44% 44% 0%
WebHelp 42% 39% 8%
HTML5 44% 28% 56%
XML 26% 21% 27%
EPUB 24% 12% 94%
Mobile Apps 25% 11% 129%
Wiki 11% 8% 37%
JavaHelp 6% 5% 4%
Kindle 10% 5% 117%
Planning to
Current
Majority of the growth here

Figure 5. Structured authoring outputs.

While Adobe's data on the grown of structured authoring is similar to studies done by other organizations like Scriptoriun, SDL, and the Content Wrangler (see Figure 7), the data doesn't explain why there are so few structured authoring jobs on the major job boards.

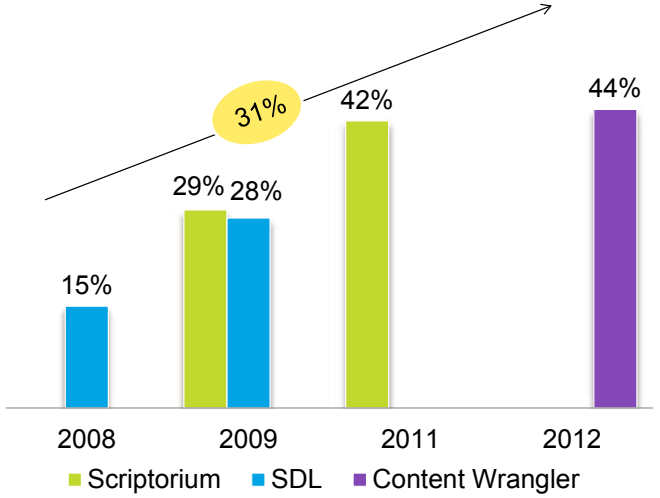


Figure 7. Organizations that collect data on structured authoring trends.

Why is there a disparity? My guess is that companies who are doing structured authoring are looking for core technical writing skills in job postings, and then training new hires on whatever particular content authoring system they are using. This is a major shift from ten years ago, when the average technical writer job posting simply said, "Technical writer needed. Must know FrameMaker and RoboHelp."

So far we've looked at techcomm hiring trends as well as trends in structured authoring. The next section discusses one more major trend—the growth of cross-silo collaboration.

The Growth of Collaboration

Collaboration is becoming more important in structured authoring as companies begin to implement cross-silo content strategies, and tool vendors begin to offer authoring environments in which subject matter experts and other contributors can create structured content. For example, Stilo International just launched AuthorBridge, an easy-to-use tool that enables people with no knowledge of DITA to create and maintain DITA content (*www.stilo.com/authorbridge*).

Over the past few years, content strategists and consultants have advocated "breaking down content silos." While breaking down organizational silos is a grand idea, in my opinion it's just never going to happen. Instead, we need to bring representatives from the various content silos (tech comm, marketing, tech support, training, etc.) together at the same table, wherein technical communication has an equal seat and voice, like a "United Nations of Content." In such

> "[In] a 'United Nations of Content,'… technical communication would have an equal voice with other content silos.

an environment, technical communication would have an equal voice with other content silos. And by having all silos at the table, companies could finally have an opportunity to overcome resistance to change and (with the participation of all at the table) create a true enterprise-wide content strategy.

Another approach to spanning content silos emerged from a discussion with Joe Gollner from Gnostyx and Cruce Saunders from Simple [A], where organizations can adopt an object-oriented approach to sharing content. Perhaps enterprise-level APIs (application programming interfaces) could be created that would enable business units to share content, regardless of how that content is stored "inside" the organizational object. (For more information about object-oriented programming, see *https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Object-oriented_programming*.)

Or perhaps a service-oriented architecture (SOA) would be a better analogy. SOA is "a paradigm for organizing and utilizing distributed capabilities that may be under the control of different ownership domains. It provides a uniform means to offer, discover, interact with and use capabilities to produce desired effects consistent with measurable preconditions and expectations" (*https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Service-oriented_architecture*).

While a whole issue of *Intercom* could be dedicated to the topics of content modeling, storage, and extraction, the point I am trying to illustrate is the clear need for content professionals who become more involved at the enterprise level.

A Seat at the Table

Does your company need a Chief Content Officer or a cross-silo unified content strategy? I'm guessing yes, and that person could be you. If so, it's time you claimed your seat at the United Nations of Content table!

JACK MOLISANI *was a project officer in the Space Division of the USAF before starting ProSpring Technical Staffing, an employment agency (*http://prospringstaffing.com*). He has a degree in computer engineering from Tulane University in New Orleans, is an STC Fellow, and a member of the Project Management Institute. Jack also produces The LavaCon Conference on Content Strategy and TechComm Management, a yearly conference founded in 2002 to help businesses solve content-related problems (*http://lavacon.org*).*

Community Achievement Award Applications Due 29 January 2016

What is the Community Achievement Award (CAA)?

The STC Community Achievement Award exists to recognize our communities for providing outstanding member services, modeling success, fostering innovation, encouraging collaboration, and ultimately serving the members of STC. This award honors STC communities that have achieved success by offering their members the best possible STC experience.

There are four levels of recognition: Platinum, Gold, Silver, and Bronze. An award of Bronze means that a community is running properly and providing programs and services that further the mission of the Society. Silver, Gold, and Platinum awards are given to communities that go above and beyond the minimum requirements. Awards are based on a point system that is clearly defined in the Guidelines document, which can be found at *www.stc.org/membership/recognition/awards/1221-community-achievement-award*.

The CAAs will be presented at the 2016 STC Summit in Anaheim, CA.

Who Should Apply for the Award?

All STC communities (Chapters, SIGs, and Student Chapters) should apply for this award! There is a single application that has been created to accommodate the different community types.

Earning a CAA means that you have a successful community. You can post the award banner on your website, brochure, or other communications. It gives your community credibility, and people are more likely to join your community if you have a good track record.

Why Should You Apply?

Take advice from community leaders who have applied for CAA and used it for community planning:

"Completing the CAA for our community is important for the following reasons:

- It helps us keep track of our accomplishments
- It also helps us identify opportunities for improvement
- Most of all, completing the CAA helps us formally recognize all our volunteers who work hard to make our community successful."

—Jamye Sagan, past co-manager of IDL SIG

"NEO STC has earned a Community Achievement Award from the Society for over ten years for its outstanding service to members.

These distinctions:

- Are impressive to spotlight on our NEO chapter website, include in marketing and promotional materials, and use for volunteer recruitment
- Can attract nonmembers to check out chapter programs, and make them into potential future members
- Give the NEO chapter members a level of pride about their chapter. No matter what your level of participation is in the chapter, each NEO member plays a role in making these achievements come to fruition. "

—Janean Voss, Past President, Northeast Ohio STC chapter

Tips for Applying

Plan Ahead: While it's too late to begin planning for the 2015 year, use the award criteria as a success plan to run your community in 2016. Assign a community member to keep track of accomplishments, and have council/board members report to that individual when they have accomplished something. An immediate past president/manager is often a good choice for keeping track of accomplishments.

Take credit where credit is due: Thoroughly read through the new application and guidelines and make sure to take credit for all of the accomplishments of your community. If you are in doubt about an activity, feel free to reach out to the CAAEC chair with your questions.

Use Innovative Activities: If your community is doing activities you believe should count on your application, include a description of those items in the Innovation section of the application.

What's New This Year?

- The application and guidelines documents have been completely revised and simplified. (Note: After the initial presentation of the new application at the 2015 Summit, the committee made significant changes in response to community leaders' concerns. If you have not seen the latest version, please take a look.)
- There is now a single, shorter application regardless of community type (some minor alterations are made to point values for individual line items based on community type).
- The number of activities has been pared down to the core amount

that the board feels is necessary for running a successful community.
- Communities receive awards on points earned, and the award levels are spelled out clearly on the application. There are no individual award sections (besides required activities) to complete. Communities are judged on standard criteria and, as always, communities are not in competition with each other.
- There is a new bonus section where communities can earn extra points in addition to the base points for going 'above and beyond.'

Get More Information

The CAA Application and the CAA Guidelines for 2015 Activities can be found on the STC website at *www.stc.org/membership/recognition/awards/1221-community-achievement-award*.

Questions?

Contact the Community Achievement Awards evaluation committee (CAAEC) chair, MaryKay Grueneberg, at *marykay.stc@gmail.com*.

Details on the 2016 Summit Official Hotel

BY MOLLY JIN | *Director of Education and Meetings*

THE 2016 SUMMIT takes place 15–18 May 2016 in Anaheim, CA. This year, the official conference location and hotel is the Anaheim Marriott, located at 700 West Convention Way, Anaheim, California 92802.

Catch some rays with your colleagues in picturesque Anaheim, minutes from beautiful beaches, exciting theme parks, dining and shopping, and all that Southern California has to offer! The Anaheim Marriott combines luxury accommodations with world-class meeting space, making it the ideal location for the 2016 Summit. All Summit events including education sessions and the Expo Hall will take place on *one level* at the Anaheim Marriott, just steps away from your room. With newly renovated guest rooms and common areas, a variety of dining options and a brand new bar, plus tons of networking space, the Anaheim Marriott is THE place to relax with friends and enjoy your conference stay. With endless choices of activities outside your hotel room, we encourage you to come in early or extend your stay to take full advantage of your visit to Anaheim and Southern California.

STC has negotiated a special conference room rate of $205 (plus applicable taxes and fees) for single or double accommodations at the Anaheim Marriott. All attendees who make reservations in the STC room block will receive complimentary Internet access in their guest room (a value of $9.95 per day).

Registration opens 1 December, with the early bird rate only available for a limited time. Register early to get the best rate possible and ensure your spot at the premier technical communication conference!

Be sure to check out the Summit website, *www.summit.stc.org*, for full details on Summit registration rates, additional hotel information, and activities in and around Anaheim.

See you in Anaheim!

TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION SUMMIT'16

STC's 63rd Annual Conference

The Anaheim Marriott Hotel

The *2014–2015 Salary Database* Is Now Available for Download and Purchase

THE *2014–2015 SALARY DATABASE* is now available for download. All 2016 members receive a free copy via email of the Salary Database PDF, which includes charts, maps, and an evaluation by an economist. Nonmembers may purchase the publication for $149. Visit *www.stc.org/publications/products/salary-database* for full details.

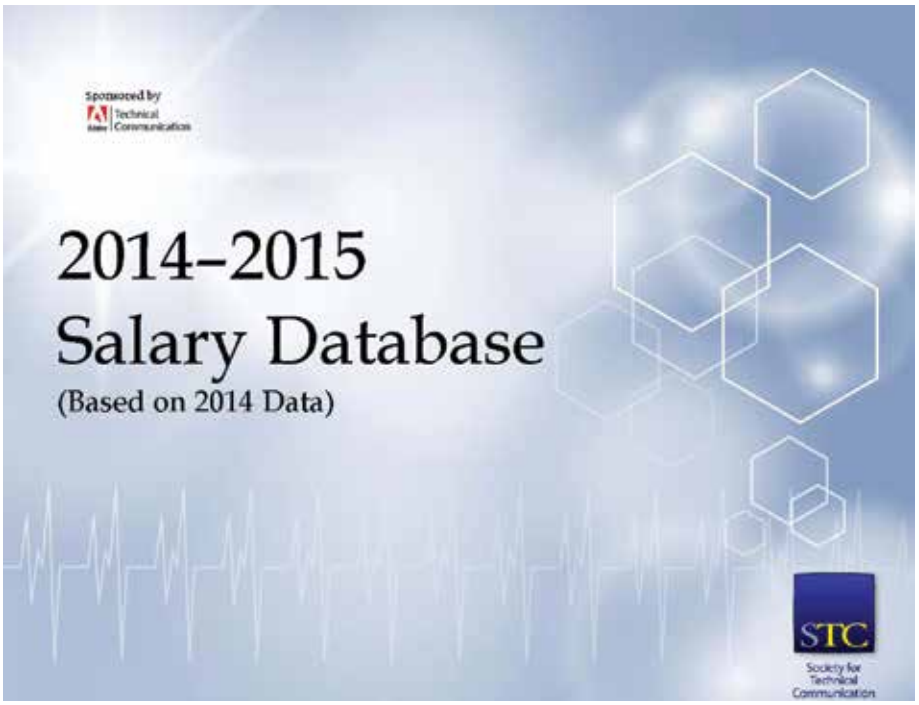
The STC *Salary Database* is a tool that can be used to conduct more powerful job searches, make a strong case for a raise, or prepare department payroll budgets. The data in the *Salary Database* are drawn from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) Occupational Employment Statistics (OES), the main resource of human resource departments across the United States.

Use the STC *Salary Database* if you are:

- **An employee** looking for solid facts to back up a raise request
- **A manager** seeking salary figures to assist with setting budgets or bidding for projects
- **A freelancer** investigating average hourly fees for a different industry or city
- **A job-seeker** needing insight on what industries and what geographic areas hold the most new jobs
- **A global technical communicator** looking for rates to charge or pay for a project or consultant in the United States
- **Any technical communicator** in need of either annual or hourly wage information

This year's data offers new insights into how the emerging recovery has and will continue to influence the demand for technical writers. The most dramatic story is the growing importance of export markets to the U.S. economy, but the *Database* also shows a shift from traditionally large markets for technical writers both regionally and by industry. The *Database* also highlights the largest and fastest-growing industries and geographic areas in terms of both wage growth and job growth.

Members and nonmembers can also purchase the data in Excel spreadsheets to format, analyze, and manipulate the data easily. Visit *www.stc.org/publications/products/salary-database* for more information on the *Salary Database* or to purchase Excel spreadsheets. Check your 2016 membership receipt for a link to the free PDF.



Interested in Learning More?

Are you interested in learning how to utilize the information in the STC *Salary Database* to its maximum advantage without needing to be a statistical expert and without requiring a substantial amount of time in analysis? Listen to the recording of the free, member-only webinar, presented by Michael Becher.

2015 STC Salary Database: Utilizing the Information and Key Trends

Presented by Michael Becher, Senior Project Director, Industry Insights, Inc.

During this webinar, participants will discover the answers to these questions and more:

- What is the health of the occupation?
- How does your pay compare to other technical writers?
- Which areas in the United States are hot spots for technical writers?
- Which industry sectors are seeing the most growth for the occupation?

Visit *http://stc.adobeconnect.com/p3bvcbudacg/*.

Technical Communication Initiates Cover Competition

STARTING WITH the February 2016 issue of *Technical Communication*, the cover of the STC's research journal will be a juried space for graphic artists to display their creative efforts. Every quarter the editor will issue a call for illustrations on a specific topic, and a jury of international composition will review the submissions. The winning illustration will be displayed on the cover and honorable mentions will be included inside the journal, each with a brief explanation of how the illustration addresses the topic.

Technical Communication is unusual in the field because the cover of the journal changes with each issue. The new cover competition allows us to seize the opportunity offered by a changing cover to bring greater attention to the substantive contribution of graphic artists as well as to the rhetorical power of visual communication.

The inaugural competition—on the topic "The Future of Technical Communication"—brought in 35 impressive submissions, from academic and industry environments, by professional and student artists. Below are the five leading images picked by the jury. Which do you think will make the cover?

The competition for the May 2016 issue—on the topic of "Social Media Practices in Technical Communication"—closes on 1 January. The call for the August 2016 issue is coming soon.

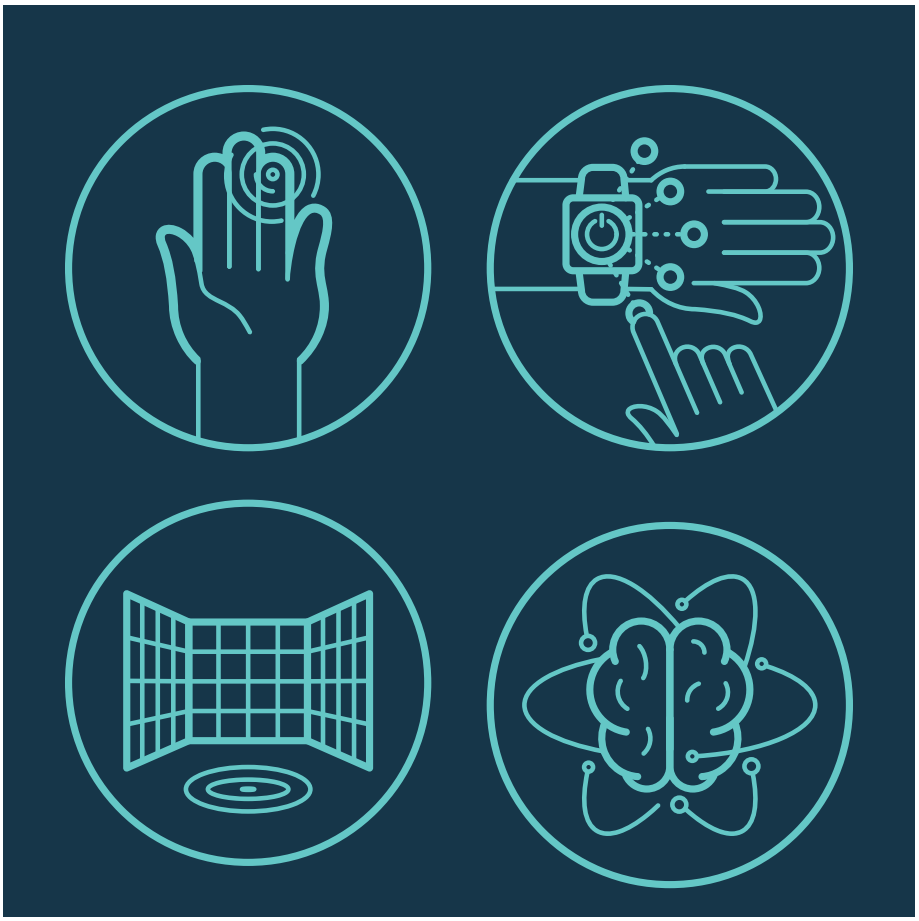
STC 2014 -2015 Salary Database

The 2014-2015 Salary Database is now available! The STC Salary Database is a tool that can be used to conduct more powerful job searches, make a strong case for a raise, or prepare department payroll budgets.

Visit www.stc.org/publications/products/salary-database to download or purchase today!

Sponsored by: Adobe | Technical Communication

An Overview: Where We Have Been and Where We Are Going



shutterstock.com/venimo

BY JEANETTE EVANS | *Associate Fellow* and **CHARLES DULL**

A FEW YEARS AGO mobiles, mobile apps, cloud computing, and ebooks topped lists of emerging technology trends such as the Horizon Report. Today we see a move on these lists to wearable tech, bring your own device, and 3D printing, with a continuation of mobile and cloud computing. Online learning and flipped/blended learning are trends as well. For example, in flipped and blended learning, we see predictions of letting students watch lectures online in order to give teachers a chance to spend time in class on real-time collaborative activities and areas that challenge students. And in the online learning arena, we see continued growth and a move to measuring effectiveness.

Whether we work in an area related to education or not, it is always worthwhile to be aware of trends in educational technology to see if we can use related techniques for the audiences we serve in our own work.

The Horizon Report

The 2015 Higher Education Horizon Report (12th edition) is a collaborative effort by the New Media Consortium (NMC) that identifies technologies that likely have an impact on learning and teaching in higher education (*www.nmc.org/publication/nmc-horizon-report-2015-higher-education-edition*). Trends, challenges, and important developments appear in the report. The report notes that "with more than 13 years of research ... the NMC Horizon Project can be regarded as the world's longest-running exploration of emerging technology trends."

Trends identified that could be of greatest interest to teachers of technical communication include:

- Evolution of online learning
- Rethinking of learning spaces
- A rise of data drive learning and assessments
- Agile approaches to change

Challenges of greatest interest include:

- Defining and support digital literacy
- Blending formal and informal learning
- Competition from new models of education

This column investigates emerging technologies in education and how we might use them in our work. Whether it is social media, wearable technologies, the latest in printers, personalization, big data, BYOD, cloud computing, mobile apps, MOOCs, analytics, digital identity, haptic interfaces, augmented reality, or the internet of things, we can all benefit from current thinking on these technologies. Contact the columnists at *jeanette.evans@sbcglobal.net.*

Figure 1. Screenshot from augmented reality instructions for a BMW car repair procedure.

Important developments of interest include:

- Bring your own device
- Flipped classrooms
- Wearable technology
- The Internet of Things

Per the 2015 Horizon Report, the Internet of Things can be defined as a "network of objects that link the physical world with the world of information through the web." Objects, sensors, and devices "can now be addressable and findable across the internet." This can be useful for "tracking objects that monitor equipment or materials, point of sale purchases, and ... inventory management." It may be for many of us just a matter of time before we provide related documentation support, training materials, and other information products. We may be working on the "many web tools that allow objects to be annotated with descriptions, photographs ... and other contextual information; the Internet of Things makes access to these data as easy as it is to use the web."

Wearable technologies can include items of clothing such as shoes or a jacket, or an accessory such as sunglasses or a backpack. Wearable technology can "integrate tools that track sleep, movement, location, and social media." Google Glass is an example of wearable technologies, letting users see information about their surroundings. Smart watches like the Apple Watch are another example of wearable technologies, letting users check email and complete other tasks through a highly portable interface.

Microlearning and Education

We hear so much about how attention spans are currently shrinking with people unable to put down their phones. Shrinking attention spans is a debatable topic, but we do see greater consumption of media and video content. We should keep this in mind as we develop learning products especially for technologies that are changing rapidly. Techniques useful in the past may not apply today especially for a changing work environment. Content that is shorter and to the point is often better in today's world and something to consider for documentation.

The Next Tech

Culture and technology today are blending and integrating into our lives. We used to use technology. Now technology is used so seamlessly that we often do not realize it is technology. Examples include tweets, big data, analytics, microblogs, Facebook, bring your own device, and augmented reality (for example, Figure 1's augmented reality instructions for a BMW car repair procedure (*www.youtube.com/watch?v=P9KPJlA5yds*). Wearable tracking technologies like FitBit, Apple Watch, or the iPod change how we live.

Two learning methods are popular. Compacted learning often comes as a result and something we can consider as we prepare documentation or whatever learning product deliverable would be a good fit for the application. Microlearning can include massive open online courses where you learn what you want, if you want, what part you want, and when you want. New educational communication tools for these methods include:

- Skype
- Webex
- Dimdim
- Adobe Connect
- Google Hangout

We live in a sound byte age. Younger generations have grown up thinking answers to questions are Google searches. Learning environments will change to on demand. Technology will continue to be more agile, merging use with life. The latest technology could be yesterday's news, but we will continue to use tools to stay current.

JEANETTE EVANS (jeanette.evans@sbcglobal.net) *has been active in STC for many years. She earned her MS in technical communication management from Mercer University and is currently providing technical writing services for groups such as Cuyahoga Community College.*

DR. CHARLES DULL (charles.dull@tri-c.edu) *holds the position of Assistant Dean in the Office of eLearning & Innovation at Cuyahoga Community College. He speaks often on topics such as emerging technologies and social media.*

Social Media, Technical Communication, and the Academic Conversation

shutterstock.com/nopporn

BY THOMAS BARKER | *Fellow*

THE STATE OF the discipline of technical writing is always emerging because it lies at the intersection of content and media. These two ideas interact in interesting ways because from them come what we call information, and from that we derive value. This interaction and its evolution raise interesting academic issues of knowledge and how we validate what we know. It creates a path for scholars.

Social media changes how information is created and used in the social arena. David Carr, in "How Social Media Changes Technical Communication," has lots to say about how social media challenges editing and production control. But it also changes what we think of as "knowledge," and it changes how companies relate to their customers and to their employees. Social media—social networking services, microbloging, bookmarking services, content curation services ("thumbs up or down") customer evaluation and feedback forums, and wiki sites—function to connect people and allow them to share content. They facilitate content aggregation, but more importantly and problematically, they are shaped by the whims and desires of users. Media remakes the relationship between writers and readers.

In the scholarship of technical writing, media also changes how we study knowledge. The study of knowledge, or *epistemology*, is a draw for technical communication scholars. In technical communication, and in all communication, "what we really know" is commonly shaped by writers' actions. We depend on intentional writers to proxy readers' questions, to anticipate qualifications, to vet alternative thinking. All along, through the process of time, what we know sifts out of what we think we know, and what remains is really knowledge. That sounds obvious, but to the scholar it represents an epistemological process of reduction through acceptance that is guided by the affirmation of consensus. For this there are theories of dissemination of technology or cybernetic systems that attract scholars.

The Greek scholars knew all about "social media" when they took their discussions outdoors. Outdoors, with the bright Mediterranean sunlight glowing on marble walls (the 5th century BC version of social media), made it easier to see truth and how it was made, epistemologically. The outdoors of today is open source, community content, and Twitter. Social media is our century's affirmation that shapes what we finally know. The problem with it is that the process is messy and unpredictable. The result is often obscure and contradictory for technical writers; for academics it's a theoretical playground.

Much writing on social media and technical communication focuses on the ways community content challenges professional writers and editors to curate user content in ways that enhance the editors' value in the product development cycle. That has certainly been the direction of technical communication in the past: to find the value that writers bring to information.

But the influences that shape knowledge today are part of larger economies of giving, of social compact, of leadership and community. The dynamic of information today is the engagement and wellbeing of

This column focuses on a broad range of practical academic issues from teaching and training to professional concerns, research, and technologies of interest to teachers, students, and researchers. Please send comments and suggestions to *ttbarker@ualberta.ca.*

society, and the role of communicators is to see and align with the multitude of voices. For the technical communication scholar, the multitude of voices suggests research questions like: How does interpretive discourse affect the values of technical communication? (Williams). How does social media in corporations constrain the agency of individual content providers? (Weber). These kinds of studies bring a scholarly perspective by asking the questions behind the questions posed by social media. They represent the theoretical value of customer content.

The impulse to mine customer content has always been strong in technical writers. In the past, community content was derived from user communities. Technical writers of the past knew that users adapted products to their specific situations, to the domain tasks of users. Often this adaptation was deemed sub-optimal because it involved using menu features and functionalities in innovative ways. It wasn't planned, it just emerged. And writers and editors strove to stay ahead of the curve by using forums and user surveys.

Also staying ahead of the curve, technical communication scholars pose theoretical questions, such as, "What are the legal implications of customer content?" (Helyar) or "How can we conduct research using social media and Web 2.0 tools?" (Thacker and Dayton). The two-way communication aspect of social media opens up questions for scholars.

Establishing two-way communication between writers and users led to help systems that advertised that customer feedback made the product better. Messages that said "We want you to help improve our product" began showing up on screens as a way of encouraging users to vet knowledge, to have their say, and to let the system administrators know whether an article was useful. Again, community curation in the form of assessment and evaluation was emerging as a value proposition.

The problem with community content that has evolved into something writers cannot dismiss is that it is messy and lacks the shine of a well-produced information product. To address this problem, writers and editors took on the role of lurkers in forums. They were like ghostwriters for individuals who couldn't organize, tag, cross-reference, or otherwise make content systematic and searchable. In some forums, writers or product representatives became just another voice in the stream, identified by the company logos in their profiles instead of cartoon characters or generic person icons.

Now we have crowd documentation (*http://blog.ninlabs.com/2012/05/crowd-documentation*). The primary goal of a crowds programming site like *stackoverflow.com* is to turn the world of documentation on its head. In this model, similar to that of Get Satisfaction (*https://getsatisfaction.com*), communities share information and ideas. The mechanism uses problem-solving motivation along with recognition in the form of badges inside an online customer-engagement platform. Rather than add value, these types of platforms "unlock" value.

Customer community platforms wrangle the disorganization inherent in social media, and in doing so address one of the main concerns of the technical writing community: that community knowledge lacks intentional design. And as such, it undercuts the proposition that writers and editors add value. But at the same time, customer platforms allow something to emerge—relevancy. The problem with traditional content management was that it missed the detail and relevance that made documentation useful in the first place. Writers and editors cannot overlook this fact. Community documentation has real relevance to users' workplace problems, to how users apply software systems to real issues. Community documentation reflects the concerns of users and their work communities. But what about the broader communities? How might a scholar approach the broader questions?

Author Clay Shirky in *Here Comes Everybody* takes on the challenge by asking, "What happens when people are given the tools to do things together, without needing traditional organizational structures?" Similarly, Howard Rheingold, in *Smart Mobs,* examines the social and economic implications of social media. These writers reflect the concerns of technical writers and put the issues they face into the broader context of communication and society.

In public health, the focus of customer orientation is on the role of social media and the touch-points of customer contact—the click, call, or counter of interaction with health systems. What social media has allowed health agencies to do is to build business models based on evidence-based practice or outcomes-based service delivery. These interactive practice frameworks narrow the gap between customers and health providers. They derive value from the cyclic process of knowledge creation, rather than the older model of one-way knowledge transfer. The question of what's next for public health lies in process. New directions lie in finding emergent ways to interact and engage with clients and patients.

Engagement research lies at the heart of expertise-based educational reform, government community involvement, disaster communication, workplace communication, and leadership communication. Social media platforms as channels make it easier than ever for academic professionals in these fields to connect with theoretical concerns with customers, clients, and citizens. For technical communicators, they open an arena for communicative activity that revitalizes the processes of content creation and management. Scholars from Utah State University ask questions about how well community-based research methods, often fueled by social media approaches, suit the empowerment and development of understanding and knowledge. The

access to communities provided by media lead to increased connections between health communities and their constituents.

For academic technical communicators, the connections made by virtue of social media make possible otherwise clumsy forms of research, such as the "messy" community-based research in the previous example. In the 1970s, environmental researchers had to attend meetings, listen to debates, and engage through community-service mechanisms. That is changing because of the way media not only enables emergent voices, but also opens the possibility of participation and scholarship. Conversations that were once hard to hear or to gain access to are being broadcasted on social media. Researchers doing participatory action research see these as opportunities to study the involvement of customers and companies. Looking ahead, we may see a bright future for another emerging trend—community-engaged scholarship.

Enlightened technical communication practitioners see social media as a bellwether opportunity to study the involvement of customers and companies; their partners in the academic realm see it as the beginning of even more productive academic conversations.

REFERENCES

Carr, David F. How Social Media Changes Technical Communication. *Information Week*, 4 January 2012, *www.informationweek.com/how-social-media-changes-technical-communication/d/d-id/1102043?*.

Helyar, Pamela S., and Gregory M. Doudnikoff. Walking the Labyrinth Off Multimedia Law. *Technical Communication* 41.4 (1994): 662–671, *www.jstor.org/stable/43089749*.

Rheingold, Howard. *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution*. Basic Books, 2013.

Shirky, Clay. *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*. Penguin Books, 2009.

Thacker, C., and D. Dayton. Using Web 2.0 to Conduct Qualitative Research. *Technical Communication* 55.4 (2008): 383–391.

Walton, Rebecca, Maggie Zraly, and Jean Pierre Mugengana. Values and Validity: Navigating Messiness in a Community-Based Research Project in Rwanda, *Technical Communication Quarterly* 24.1 (2015): 45–69.

Weber, Ryan. Constrained Agency in Corporate Social Media Policy. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication* 43.3 (July 2013): 289–315.

Williams, Sean D. Interpretive Discourse and Other Models from Communication Studies: Expanding the Values of Technical Communication. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication* 40.4 (October 2010): 429–446.

"I MET MANY OF MY FAVORITE PEOPLE THANKS TO STC"
"When I first joined STC and started going to meetings, I quickly realized that STC provided some of the best networking and professional development opportunities for our profession. I was coming from working in a veterinary clinic, which is a totally different world, and I didn't have a lot of contacts in technical communication. Today, most of my work friends and some of my closest personal friends are a direct result of being an active volunteer in STC."
Kit Brown-Hoekstra
MY NAME IS KIT BROWN-HOEKSTRA AND
I'M AN STC MEMBER
STC org/renew

Mark Your Calendar

Organization Events Across the Globe

F.Y.I. lists information about nonprofit ventures only. Please send information to *intercom@stc.org.*

1 4-7 Nov
The **American Translators Association (ATA)** will hold its 56th annual conference at the Hyatt Regency Miami in Miami, FL. For more information, contact:
ATA
+1 (703) 683-6100
ata@atanet.org
www.atanet.org/conf/2015

2 6-10 Nov
The **American Society for Information Science and Technology (ASIS&T)** will hold its Annual Meeting in St. Louis, MO. For more information, contact:
ASIS&T
asis@asis.org
https://www.asist.org/events/annual-meeting

3 8-10 Nov
The **Public Relations Society of America (PRSA)** hosts their international conference in Atlanta, GA. For more information, contact:
PRSA
+1 (800) 350-0111
www.prsa.org/Conferences/InternationalConference/

4 11-12 Nov
The **India Chapter of STC** will hold its 16th annual conference at the Hyatt Regency, Nagar Road in Pune, India. For more information, contact:
STC India
www.stc-india.org
http://www.stc-india.org/conferences/2015/

5 25–28 Jan 2016
The Annual **Reliability and Maintainability Symposium (RAMS)** 2016 will be held at Loews Ventana Canyon in Tucson, AZ. This year's theme is "R&M: Critical to Success in a Technology Reliant World." For more information, contact:
RAMS
+1 (603) 863-2832
www.rams.org

6 11–15 Feb
The 2016 **American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS)** Annual Meeting will take place at the Washington Marriott Wardman Park in Washington, DC. The theme is "Global Science Engagement." For more information, please contact:
AAAS
+1 (202) 326-6450
meetings@aaas.org
http://meetings.aaas.org

7 8–10 Apr
The 2016 **International Society for Performance Improvement** Annual Conference will take place at the Loews Philadelphia Hotel in Philadelphia, PA. For more information, please contact:
ISPI
+1 (301) 587-8570
info@ispi.org
http://ispi.org

8 15–18 May
The **Society for Technical Communication** will host its 63rd Annual Summit at the Anaheim Marriott in Anaheim, CA. For more information, please contact:
STC
+1 (703) 522-4114
http://summit.stc.org/conference/

9 15-18 June
The 2016 **American Society for Indexing** Annual Conference will take place at the Conference Chicago University Center in Chicago, IL. For more information, please contact:
ASI
+1 (480) 245-6750
info@asindexing.org
http://www.asindexing.org/conference-2016/

* STC-related event

How "Jill" Landed Her Dream Techcomm Career

BY MARILYN WOELK | *Senior Member*

AS A CONTINUATION of my September 2015 *Intercom* article, *Jack (or Jill) of All Trades,* I want to tell you how this "Jill" has gone through an evolution in tech comm. I want to help others who have experienced the "Who Moved My Cheese?" scenario and are wondering where to go next.

I should start by giving you the background on my evolution. I have managed ~24 employees and subcontractors and spent time working in business process improvement, change management, marketing, information design, publications process, and localization. My business stayed on the same trajectory for about 12 years, but then several factors reoriented my direction.

My business "right-sized" over the years as the economy shifted. My clients changed how they contracted for services. As a result, I had fewer projects and didn't rehire subcontractors to new projects or replace staff. Eventually, I went back to my earlier business model (working out of my home office instead of a commercial office space, and hiring subcontractors instead of employees).

In 2005, I stepped out of the techcomm profession in order to manage medical staff (five nurses and CNAs) for four aging relatives. This involved using all of my management and communication skills and gave me a great background for medical writing, but it was too time consuming and unpredictable to combine with project work in tech comm. In 2012, I began to work again with a few small clients in marketing communications, event planning, editing, and promotion on projects in insurance and investments (involving regulatory compliance) and book projects, including a medical book.

These small projects helped me embrace technology that I had abandoned while on sabbatical from the profession. I was publishing books on Amazon for my clients, attending and speaking at STC conferences, and beginning to market my business again.

The challenges I faced moving forward included:

- "Cold" project leads.
- The need to catch up on new technology.
- The need to catch up on new processes, which had changed dramatically due to the explosion of social media, blogs, collaborative work teams, virtual teams, and iterative development processes like Agile.
- The desire to work at the same professional level but without the employees, office space, or a workforce to manage.
- The desire to work from home and to maintain my status as a vendor and not just a contract worker.

Fast forward to today. This "Jill" has found a great fit with a Fortune 500 client who needed a communications person to support high-level enterprise-wide deployments of software that would streamline processes for all employees. The position came from a project lead with a previous client. My position requires a knowledge of:

- Business development and processes
- Software and technical subjects
- Branding and graphics development
- Change management
- Global factors (translation and localization for multiple countries)
- User audiences (executive, management, and employee)

My "cheese" has been moved in the following ways. In this position, I am less of a "Lone Ranger" and more integrated with the team's activities. The project is managed in another country. I work on a virtual global team with members (most of whom I've never met) in several U.S. states, the United Kingdom, India, and a long list of other deployment countries. We live in different time zones, the way we spell and the languages we use differ, as do our work processes. I am integrated into a team (and not managing it) for the first time in a long time as the communications lead. I have also learned new technology and processes that enabled our virtual communication and work. I have learned more about doing business with diverse cultures and planning for mass communications rollouts in multiple languages.

The project is affected by software changes, laws in multiple countries, and hardware and connectivity situations in various locations. Our work product is new, so the model is refined constantly as we discover the path forward. The development schedules are rapid and the timelines are always evolving. The project is full of constantly moving targets.

Some deliverables are reviewed by high-level executives. The traditional draft-and-review process does not apply, especially since we are capturing software changes and other information iteratively. Often the communications revision process involves compiling comments or discussing changes with the virtual team via email or Web meetings (and sometimes editing or rewriting things "live" in those meetings). And because of the global nature of the product, time zones may affect meeting times.

Each communication can have over 50-100 versions (four to eight versions per country based on one communication being modified for four different audiences times one or two business units). The number and type of communications varies based on the product being launched, and there can be 100+ communications times 15-80 countries times 3-4 audiences per country. Based on the product, communications will be delivered in 5-15 languages.

The bottom line is that this "Jill" has landed a job doing what she loves: complexity, creativity, strategic planning, technology, change management, and solutions building. And I still write. I still check out software configurations. I still have my own consulting business. I still do work for other clients who have longer timelines. Ah yes, this is just enough "chaos" to keep this Jill of All Trades happy. I hope that you find your cheese, too!

Deliver a superior content consumption experience to end users with the new HTML5 layout

Announcing the 2015 release of Adobe RoboHelp

Dynamic content filters | New HTML5 layout | Mobile app output support | Modern ribbon UI

Upgrade to the new Adobe RoboHelp (2015 release) for just US$399.00

Try Now | Request Demo | Request Info

In the new release of Adobe RoboHelp, the latest HTML5 Responsive Layouts support Dynamic Filtering giving users the option to filter the content and see just what is relevant to them. Content Categories in WebHelp gave users the ability to choose sub-sets that had been defined by the author. Dynamic Filtering in HTML5 goes much further as the author can give more options and the user gets to choose which ones they want. Also the author can easily create an app in both iOS and Android formats."

—Peter Grainge, Owner, www.grainge.org

Take Advantage of Free Gold Support for 30-day Trial

Call 800-833-6687
(Monday-Friday, 5am-7pm PST)

Adobe, the Adobe logo, and RoboHelp are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Adobe Systems Incorporated in the United States and/or other countries.
© 2015 Adobe Systems Incorporated. All rights reserved.